

## Provision of Early Childhood Special Education to Children with Deafness Enrolled in Public Sector Special Schools in Punjab: A Mixed Method Enquiry

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### Abstract

*The aim of this mixed-method research study was to find out existing conditions, facilities, services and practices in Early Childhood Special Education for young children with deafness from ages 3-8 years. The population of study consisted of all Government Deaf & Defective Hearing Schools working throughout the Punjab province, their administrators, and teachers. The number of administrators participating in the study was 25. The sample size of teachers was 76 (females=55, males=21) selected from 25 districts of the Punjab through simple random sampling. One interview schedule for administrators and one questionnaire for teachers dealing with young children with deafness were developed. Data were collected in person by arranging meetings with administrators and teachers. Data gathered from administrators were analysed after transcribing and coding their responses. Emerging themes were derived. Major findings were reported. Recommendations to the Punjab Special Education Department were made and conclusions were drawn. Implications for teacher training programs in special education were discussed.*

**Keywords:** *Early Childhood Special Education, Young Children with deafness, Public Sector Special Schools, Punjab Province.*

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### Introduction

Early Childhood Special Education refers to free, appropriate, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of preschool children with disabilities whose age range is between three to five years. They are provided with instruction in any of the following settings: Home, hospitals, institutions, special schools, classrooms, and community child care or preschool settings, or both. (U.S. Department of Education, 2006; Oregon Department of Education, 2013). Hart and Risley (1995) defined deafness as, the most frequent sensory deficit in human populations, affecting more than 250 million people in the world. Consequences of deafness include inability to interpret speech sounds, often producing a reduced ability to communicate, delay in language acquisition, economic and educational disadvantage, social isolation and stigmatisation (Fatima, Malik, Ch., & Nayab, 2017).

Educated deaf individuals are lagging far behind hearing persons and other persons with disabilities (e.g., visually impaired or persons with physical disabilities) in academics (Gallaudet Research Institute, 2005; Stinson & Walter, 1997), social integration (World Health Organization, 2013) and job placement (Blanchfield, Feldman, Dunbar, & Gardner, 2001; MacLeod-Gallinger, 1992; Schroedel & Geyer, 2000).

After reviewing the relevant body of research and having discussions with professionals working in the field of deafness and with parents of educated deaf individuals, it is evident that in spite of spending a long period of time in special schools, the speech and language (both oral and written) of deaf students are not developed to the extent that they have residual hearing (Fatima, 2015; Hart & Risley, 1995). This deficit creates communication barriers and results in low academic achievement (Bowe, 1991; Marschark, 2006; Meadow-Orleans, 2001; Moores, 2001, social exclusion (Bashir, 2009), and poor rate of job placement. In addition, educated deaf persons who are employed are not performing up to the mark due to poor reading and writing skills and problems in communication with hearing persons (Ahmed & Rehman, 2006; Fatima, Ch, & Malik, 2016; Zulfiqar & Kousar, 2006).

Early years of life (3-8 years) play a vital role in the development of all children with and without disabilities (Fatima, Malik, Abid, Nayab, 2016; Nicholas & Geers, 2006). If deaf children are provided with early intervention, hearing aids, speech therapy, sessions on verbal and written language, auditory training, and speech reading during the early years of life, they can perform better (Fatima, Malik, Ch., & Nayab, 2017; Hart & Risley, 1995; Nathan, Goulondris & Snowling, 2004; Rescorla, 2002; Scarborough, 1990; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1990 ). The present condition of educated deaf individuals finds its roots in early childhood special education (Fatima, Malik, & Khan, 2018) that is being provided at preschool age in Government Deaf & Defective Hearing Schools of the Punjab province. It seems that this program is not fulfilling its objectives and some gaps exist. This situation motivated us to study the provision of Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) to young children with deafness.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study was conducted to achieve the following objectives:

- To know the facilities and services being provided to young children with deafness in Government Deaf & Defective Hearing Schools of the Punjab province.
- To identify academic opportunities for young children with deafness.
- To investigate organizing training courses for teachers and parents of young children with deafness.

### **Questions of the Study**

The study was conducted to answer the following questions:

- What are the facilities and services being provided to young children with deafness in Government Deaf & Defective Hearing Schools in the Punjab province.
- What are the academic opportunities for young children with deafness?
- Which training courses can be organized for teachers and parents of young children with deafness?

### **Research Methodology**

We used mixed methods for this research. The population of the study consisted of principals and teachers of Government Deaf & Defective Hearing Schools in the Punjab province. A sample of 5 out of 34 principals and 76 teachers (females=55, males=21) out of 388 was randomly selected from schools of 25 districts of the Punjab province. A self-developed and structured interview schedule with open-ended questions was used to elicit responses of the principals. A self-developed questionnaire using three-point criteria (Yes, To some extent, No) was used to elicit responses of teachers dealing with young children with deafness. The reliability coefficient was .971 (Cronbach's Alpha). The questionnaire was validated by three experts from the field of deafness. Their suggestions for the improvement of the questionnaire were

welcomed and recommended changes were incorporated. Data were collected in person, on the telephone, through electronic mail, and by post. Interviews taken from the five principals were transcribed and coded. Categories were made and emerging themes were derived. Data collected from teachers were analysed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies of the responses were made.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Responses

S.No.	Statements	Yes	To some extent	No
<b>Preparation of written material</b>				
1	Are information booklets on deafness prepared for parents?	0 0%	8 24.2%	25 75.8%
2	Are information booklets on deafness prepared for professionals?	2 6.1%	8 24.2%	23 69.7%
3	Are hospitals contacted for giving information about deaf children?	0 0%	0 0%	33 100%
<b>Home-based programs</b>				
4	Are speech and language pathology services provided to children at home before seeking admission in school?	0 0	0 0	33 100
5	Are audiological services provided to children at home before seeking admission in school?	0 0	8 24.2	25 75.8
6	Are counselling services provided to the families of deaf children before seeking admission in school?	1 3.0	8 24.2	24 72.7
7	Is play group syllabus provided to children for getting prepared for preschool?	0 0	8 24.2	25 75.8
8	Are parents taught about auditory training?	0 0	0 0	33 100
9	Are parents of deaf children got trained in the use of hearing aids?	1 3.0	2 6.1	33 100
10	Are deaf children got registered before admission?	1 3.0	1 3.0	31 93.9
<b>At the time of admission</b>				
11	Are fresh audiograms of children prepared at the time of admission?	16 48.5	2 6.1	15 45.5
12	Is speech of the child assessed at the time of admission?	24 72.7	7 21.2	2 6.1
13	Is psychological assessment of the children made?	26 78.8	6 18.2	1 3.0
14	Is any admission test taken?	28 84.8	1 3.0	4 12.1
15	Is complete medical check-up made?	14 42.4	8 24.2	12 36.4
16	Is cognitive assessment done?	15 45.5	13 39.4	5 15.2
<b>Academics</b>				
17	Is service of speech/language pathology provided to children?	9 27.3	5 15.2	19 57.6
18	Is auditory training done with the young children with deafness?	4 12.1	4 12.1	25 75.8
19	Is speech reading done with the young children with deafness?	0 0	5 15.2	28 84.8
20	Are hearing aids provided to needy children free of cost?	6 18.2	15 45.5	12 36.4
21	Are hearing aids checked on daily basis?	6 18.2	2 6.1	25 75.8

		18.2	6.1	75.8
22	Are hearing aids checked on weekly basis?	7	15	11
		21.2	45.5	33.3
23	Does school make any arrangement for hearing aid repair??	5	2	26
		15.2	6.1	78.8
24	Does school make any arrangement for ear mould fabrication?	3	3	27
		9.1	9.1	81.8
25	Does school make any arrangement for ear mould maintenance?	4	1	28
		12.1	3.0	84.8
26	Is number of children in one class more than ten?	22	1	10
		66.7	3.0	30.3
27	Is teacher assisted by a helper?	9	0	24
		27.3	0	72.7
28	Is creative writing taught to young children with deafness?	11	16	6
		33.3	48.5	18.2
29	Is creative reading taught to young children with deafness?	13	19	1
		39.4	57.6	3.0
30	Is creative numeracy taught to young children with deafness?	13	7	13
		39.4	21.2	39.4
31	Are early language books taught to young children with deafness?	10	7	Y
		30.3	21.2	48.5
32	Are Urdu readers taught to young children with deafness?	6	15	12
		18.2	45.5	36.4
33	Are English readers taught to young children with deafness?	7	9	17
		21.2	27.3	51.5
34	Are books of general education taught?	8	10	15
		24.2	30.3	45.5
35	Has drawing been included as a subject in the curriculum?	21	10	2
		63.6	30.3	6.1
36	Has art &craft been included as a subject in the curriculum?	14	10	9
		42.4	30.3	27.3
	Has computer education been included in curriculum?	21	0	12
		63.6	0	36.4
<b>Physical facilities</b>				
37	Does the school own its own building?	21	0	12
		63.6	0	36.4
38	Are classrooms sound proof?	21	5	7
		63.6	15.2	21.2
39	Is clean drinking water available for children?	23	10	0
		69.7	30.3	0
40	Are fans sufficient according to the requirement?	26	7	0
		78.8	21.2	0
41	Are toilets sufficient according to the requirement?	29	3	1
		87.9	9.1	3.0
42	Are chairs sufficient according to the requirement?	29	3	1
		87.9	9.1	3.0
43	Are desks sufficient according to the requirement?	29	3	1
		87.9	9.1	3.0
44	Are uniforms being provided to all children?	32	1	0
		97.0	3.0	0
45	Are books being provided to all children?	32	1	0
		97.0	3.0	0

46	Is stipend being paid to all children?	27	3	3
		81.8	9.1	9.1
47	Are speech trainers available in school?	11	5	17
		33.3	15.2	51.5
48	Are audiometers available in school?	18	1	14
		54.5	3.0	42.4
49	Are auditory trainers available in school?	5	8	20
		15.2	24.2	60.6
50	Are classrooms sufficient according to the requirement?	6	13	14
		18.2	39.4	42.4
51	Has school had hearing aid repair lab?	5	3	25
		15.2	9.1	75.8
52	Has school had ear mould fabrication lab?	5	2	26
		15.2	6.1	78.8
53	Is school transport being provided to all children?	20	5	8
		60.6	15.2	24.2
54	Is playground available in the school?	20	3	10
		60.6	9.1	30.3
55	Are multi-media projectors available in school?	4	4	25
		12.1	12.1	75.8
56	Is television available in school?	11	9	13
		33.3	27.3	39.4
57	Are audio-visual aids available in school?	11	9	13
		33.3	27.3	39.4
58	Has children's library been established in the school?	5	4	24
		15.2	12.1	72.7
<b>Professional facilities</b>				
59	Has psychologist been appointed in school?	11	0	22
		33.3	0	66.7
60	Has speech therapist been appointed in school?	1	2	30
		3.0	6.1	90.9
61	Has an audiologist been appointed in school?	2	1	30
		6.1	3.0	90.9
62	Has an audiometerist been appointed in school?	14	1	18
		42.4	3.0	54.5
63	Has an auditory training personnel been appointed in school?	5	0	28
		15.2	0	84.8
64	Has physical education teacher been appointed in school?	13	2	18
		39.4	6.1	54.5
65	Have teachers trained in early childhood special education been appointed in school?	9	7	16
		27.3	21.2	48.5
66	Have maids been appointed for young children with deafness?	12	3	18
		36.4	9.1	54.5
67	Have art & craft teachers been appointed in school?	10	4	19
		30.3	12.1	57.6
68	Have vocational training instructor been appointed in school?	26	0	7
		78.8	0	21.2
69	Is number of special education teachers sufficient for young children with deafness?	9	19	5
		27.3	57.6	15.2
70	Has medical officer been appointed in school?	0	1	32
		0	3.0	97.0

<b>Teachers' training</b>				
71	Are teachers being imparted pre-service training?	11	0	22
		33.3	0	66.7
72	Are teachers being imparted training in early childhood special education during service?	7	6	20
		21.2	18.2	60.6
73	Do the teachers who teach to pre-school children have degree/certificate in early childhood special education?	9	0	24
		27.3	0	72.7
74	Do the teachers teaching to pre-school children have degree in special education?	24	1	8
		72.7	3.0	24.2
75	Are courses on sign language conducted for teachers of pre-school children?	22	2	9
		66.7	6.1	27.3
<b>Parents' training &amp; involvement</b>				
76	Are training courses in speech therapy arranged for parents of pre-school children?	4	0	29
		12.1	0	87.9
77	Are training courses in auditory training arranged for parents of pre-school children?	3	0	30
		9.1	0	90.9
78	Are training courses in speech reading arranged for parents of pre-school children?	3	0	30
		9.1	0	90.9
79	Are training courses in sign language arranged for parents of pre-school children?	3	0	30
		9.1	0	90.9
80	Are training courses in teaching methodologies arranged for parents of pre-school children?	0	0	33
		0	0	100
81	Are training courses in speech and language development arranged for parents of pre-school children?	0	0	33
		0	0	100
82	Are parents guided about use and maintenance of hearing aids?	1	1	31
		3.0	3.0	93.9
83	Has School Management Council been established?	3	0	30
		9.1	0	90.9
84	Are parent teacher meetings conducted on monthly basis?	2	13	18
		6.1	39.4	54.5
85	Are parents being provided with counselling services?	3	10	20
		9.1	30.3	60.6
86	Is home-school connection satisfactory?	3	13	17
		9.1	39.4	51.5
87	Do parents pay sufficient attention to their child at home?	2	19	12
		6.1	57.6	36.4
88	Are they concerned about the progress of their child in studies?	4	21	8
		12.1	63.6	24.2
89	Do they check the school diary daily?	5	18	10
		15.2	54.5	30.3
90	Do they let the home work completed under their supervision?	5	18	13
		15.2	54.5	39.4
<b>Co-curricular activities</b>				
91	Are pre-school children taken on study tours?	23	4	6
		69.7	12.1	18.2
92	Are recreational trips arranged for pre-school children?	25	3	5
		75.8	9.1	15.2
93	Are music programs arranged for young children with deafness?	27	4	2
		81.8	12.1	6.1
94	Are young children with deafness provided opportunities to participate in tableaux, dramas etc.	31	1	1
		93.9	3.0	3.0

<b>Evaluation</b>				
95	Are Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) prepared for young children with deafness?	9 27.3	4 12.1	20 60.6
96	Are formal tests/exams conducted for young children with deafness?	21 63.6	9 27.3	3 9.1
<b>Sports &amp; Games</b>				
97	Are children of pre-school age provided opportunities to participate in sports and games?	31 93.9	2 6.1	0 0
98	Are young children with deafness involved in in-door games?	32 97.0	1 3.0	0 0
99	Are young children with deafness involved in out- door games? Is Annual Sports Day organized regularly?	30 90.9	1 3.0	2 6.1
<b>Career Education</b>				
100	Are aptitudes of young children with deafness regarding future professions tried to find out?	23	1	9

## Major Findings

Major findings regarding the responses of teachers are as follow:

1. The majority of the teachers (75%) responded that schools were not preparing information booklets on deafness for parents and professionals.
2. Only a few of the teachers (24%) reported that counselling services were being provided to parents of young children with deafness before seeking admission to schools.
3. The majority of teachers (54.6%) were of the view that updated audiograms of young children with deafness were prepared at the time of admission.
4. Teachers (72.7%) opined that speech of deaf children was assessed at the time of admission.
5. A large number of teachers (78%) were of the view that psychological assessment of children was made at the time of admission.
6. A vast majority of teachers (72.8%) reported that young children with deafness were not being provided with speech therapy during school hours.
7. Teachers (76%) responded that auditory training was not being imparted to young children with deafness.
8. A large number of teachers (85%) reported that speech reading was not being taught to young children with deafness.
9. Only 18% of teachers responded that hearing aids were being provided to needy children free of cost.
10. Teachers (85%) reported that an ear mould fabrication lab had not been established in the schools.
11. Teachers (70%) were of the view that the number of young children with deafness in class was more than ten.
12. A large number of teachers (73%) reported that the teachers of young children with deafness were not assisted by any helper.
13. Only 39% of teachers responded that young children with deafness were being taught creative writing, reading, and numeracy.
14. Only a few of the teachers (30%) opined that early language books were not being taught to young children with deafness.
15. A large number of teachers (88%) reported that furniture was sufficient according to the needs of young children with deafness.
16. Just more than half (57%) of teachers responded that audiometers were available in schools.
17. A large number of teachers (70%) reported that playgrounds were not available for the children.

18. The majority of teachers (91%) responded that speech therapists and audiologists had not been appointed in their schools.
19. A large number of teachers (94%) reported that deaf young children with deafness were provided with opportunities to participate in sports and games.

### **Responses of Principals**

The responses of principals were as follows:

#### **Q1: Do you prepare information booklets on deafness for awareness purposes?**

In response to the question, principal 1, 2, and 3 answered in negation. Principal 4 responded that information booklets were being prepared for parents only. Principal 5 reported that the school was preparing information material for the awareness and guidance of both parents and professionals.

#### **Q2: Which services are being provided to young children with deafness and their families before seeking admission to school?**

Answering to this question, principals 1, and 5 shared that they were not providing any service to young children with deafness before seeking admission. Principals 2, 3, and 4 responded that they were providing counselling services to the parents of young children with deafness.

#### **Q3: Which assessments of young children with deafness are done at the time of admission?**

In response to this question, principal 1 answered that they were providing the services of hearing and psychological assessments to the young children with deafness at the time of admission whereas due to unavailability of a speech/language pathologist in school, assessment of speech and language was not done. Principals 2, 4, and 5 responded that hearing, speech and language, cognitive and psychological assessments were being done. Principal 3 responded that due to lack of staff, no assessment was being made at the time of admission.

#### **Q4: Which services are being provided to young children with deafness after seeking admission to school?**

All five principals responded that speech therapy was being done in their schools. Four out of five principals reported that speech reading was being taught to young children with deafness. Auditory training was not incorporated in the curriculum of young children with deafness. Three out of five respondents reported that hearing aids were being provided to children. Moreover, schools were also responsible for checking and repairing of hearing aids used by children. Three out of five principals reported that ear moulds were not being fabricated and maintained in their schools. Four out of five principals were of the view that creative writing was being taught to young children with deafness. Four out of five respondents said that creative reading was not being taught to young children with deafness. Three out of five respondents reported about teaching creative numeracy to young children with deafness. Three out of five teachers reported that early language books had not been incorporated in the curriculum. All of the principals reported that computer education was not included in the syllabus for young children with deafness. Four out of five principals responded that Urdu and English Readers were being taught to young children with deafness. All of the principals reported that drawing was being taught to young children with deafness.

#### **Q5: What physical facilities are available for young children with deafness in your school?**

All of the principals responded that their schools had their own buildings, but classrooms for young children with deafness were not sound proof. Two out of five principals responded that furniture was not

sufficient for young children with deafness. All of the principals reported that uniforms and stipends were being provided regularly to young children with deafness. Two of them had reservations about provision of books. All of the principals reported about unavailability of speech and auditory trainers. Audiometers were reported to be available in all five schools. Four out of five principals reported about insufficient classrooms. Two out of five respondents reported about unavailability of playgrounds. Transport was reported to be available in all five schools. A children's library had not been established in any of the five schools.

**Q6: Which professional facilities are available for young children with deafness in your school?**

Three out of five principals reported about appointment of a psychologist in their schools. Only one principal reported about availability of a speech therapist in his school. Two out of five respondents said that audiologists were appointed in their schools. Only one principal reported about unavailability of an audiometerist and three reported about unavailability of a physical education teacher in their schools. Three principals responded that maids had been appointed in their schools for taking care of young children with deafness. All of the principals reported about the appointment of drawing teachers. Three principals complained about insufficient numbers of teachers for dealing with young children with deafness.

**Q7: Which trainings are being imparted to teachers dealing with young children with deafness?**

All five principals reported about imparting pre-service training to teachers. They also responded that all teachers dealing with young children with deafness of pre-school age had degrees in special education. Only one respondent reported that in-service training was not being imparted to teachers teaching young children with deafness. Three out of five principals reported about organizing sign language courses for teachers of young children with deafness.

**Q8: Which guiding measures are being taken for parents of young children with deafness?**

Only two principals reported about providing guidance to parents on teaching methodologies. Four principals responded that parents were guided about use and maintenance of hearing aids whenever needed. All of the principals reported about establishment of School Management Councils in which parents are given membership. Only one principal responded that parent teacher meetings were arranged on a monthly basis. Almost all of the principals reported about providing counselling services to parents. They also reported that parents were not paying attention to their young children with deafness.

**Q9: Are young children with deafness provided with an opportunity to participate in co-curricular activities?**

All of the principals reported that young children with deafness were taken on study and recreational tours by the school. They were also encouraged to participate in tableaux and dramas organized on different occasions.

**Q10: How do you evaluate performance of young children with deafness?**

All five principals reported that performance of young children with deafness was evaluated through formal exams/tests. Three principals said that Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) for young children with deafness were prepared.

**Discussion**

This research was conducted to have a look into provisions of early childhood special education to young children with deafness who were enrolled in Government Deaf and Defective Hearing Schools in Punjab,

Pakistan. Some important findings of the study showed that parents of young children with deafness and professionals working in the deaf field were not being guided about deafness and its consequences. Moreover, majority of the young children with deafness was not being provided with speech therapy, auditory training, and speech reading. As a result, deaf individuals were not having developed speech and language both in oral and written form. This finding is consistent with the studies conducted by Bove (1991), Hart and Risley (1995), Marschark, (2006), Meadow-Orleans (2001), and Moores (2001) who found that deficits in speech and language create communication barriers and result in poor academics. Another important finding of the study, as reported by 91% teachers, goes that audiologists and speech therapists had not been appointed in schools who play important role in teaching speech and language, auditory training, speech reading, doing hearing assessment, fitting hearing-aids etc. In absence of these two important stake holders, young children with deafness lag far behind their hearing counterparts. As it has been concluded by Nathan, Goulandris & Snowling (2004), Rescorla (2002), and Scarborough (1990) that If deaf children are provided with early intervention, hearing aids, speech therapy, sessions on verbal and written language, auditory training, and speech reading during the early years of life, they can perform better. It was reported by 61% teachers that creative reading, writing, and numeracy was not being taught to young children with deafness. This finding is endorsed by studies conducted by Ahmed and Rehman (2006), and Zulfiqar and Kousar (2006) who found that educated deaf persons were not performing up to the mark at their workplaces due to poor reading and writing skills and problems in communication with hearing persons.

### **Implications of the Study**

The study has following implications:

1. Home-based programs should be started for the guidance and counselling of parents.
2. Qualified speech therapists, audiologists, and auditory training personnel should be appointed in all deaf schools.
3. Speech reading should be given importance.
4. Hearing aids should be provided to needy young children with deafness.
5. Ear mould fabrication labs should be established to prepare and maintain ear moulds.
6. The number of children in one class should not be more than ten.
7. Every teacher should be assisted by an assistant.
8. Creative writing, reading, numeracy, and early language books should be taught.
9. Early Childhood Special Education should be incorporated as a compulsory area of specialization in all teacher training programs of special education.

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